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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether interrelationships exist among the assignments an instructor plans to give (topic, format, and mode), the intended use of instructional time, and rank order of typical comments used in annotating student papers. The study involved the use of a short questionnaire which contained three parts: (1) questions relating to the teacher's intended assignments (according to mode, aim, and relative frequency); (2) the teacher's planned use of instructional time during the term, rated according to amount of time on certain standard topics; and (3) the teacher's rank ordering of importance of sixteen foci of annotation. A summary of the statistical analysis derived from the questionnaire is given. The conclusion drawn is that teachers frequently send students differing signals of what is important in writing by means of their responses to student papers. The questionnaire used to obtain this information is included. (LL)

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Instructor's Signals to Their Students

by C. Robert Kline, Jr.[1]

This is a report on the analysis of data of the first in a series of studies which taken together will be a very comprehensive project. After quickly tracing the background of this project, I shall present the information I have gathered and what my analysis indicates.

Historical Background of the Investigation

In 1970 at the Atlanta meeting of the NCTE a group of people gathered to discuss Instructor's Responses to Students' Writing, which was the title of a special interest group being started. At that first meeting many important ideas and statements of personal preferences, biases, and research relating to what we (as teachers of composition) do to students' papers submitted in response to our assignment. The group identified three goals for research in the area of responses to student writing:

1. Get various teachers to set down what they value in writing and what they react to in particular when looking at students' papers.

2. Analyze comments of selected instructors over a semester to determine whether patterns exist and if pattern can be described.

3. Classify assignments given by different instructors to see whether the assignments imply different goals/preferences in teaching writing.

Since Atlanta was so successful we met again and again, in various

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relationships--letters, conventions, and telephone calls--and as a group at each succeeding NCTE or CCCC convention, up to the Minneapolis NCTE (1972) meeting.

At the NCTE meeting in Las Vegas (1971) I delivered a paper entitled "Design Considerations in Studies of Composition." That paper set up a research design for investigating the three goals established one year before at Atlanta. As it has evolved the research is divided into three parts: Study One, being reported here, a study of instructors' intentions, plans, or preparatory thoughts about their composition classes. In the first study I attempted to study Goal One and part of Goal Three. Study Two, now in progress is an attempt to study Goals Two and Three. (Both Study One and Study Two are also pilot studies in that one important outcome of them will be improved methods of getting the information I want and need for Study Three.)

Study Three will attempt to study all three goals over a period of at least three terms for each respondent. The third study will begin in September 1974.

Report of the Investigation

I shall discuss first the purpose of the study, the procedure of investigation, the results of the work, and then I would like to offer some interpretative comments. The purpose of the study was simple:

> The purpose of the study was to determine whether interrelationships exist among the assignments an instructor plans to give (topic, format, and mode), the intended use of instructional time, and rank order of typical comments used in annotating student papers.

One way of looking closely at the purpose of the study is to consider the difference between analog and digital communication. Basically the difference is that of obvious, specific, verbally explicit signals and subtle, vague, non-verbal or verbally implicit signals. Some examples might help to

clarify the matter.

Analog	Digital
(1) Comments on papers	(1) Assignment exactly as given
(2) Instructional time "around" the assignment	(2) Syllabus(es)
(3) Text selection (Holt Guide differs from Harbrace Handbook; both differ from Macrorie's Telling Writing, etc.)	(3) Use of text; when and at which point attention is called to text.
(4) Haptics and Kinesics (outside the areas of study undertaken)	(4) Room, lab, office arrangements; availability of teachers, materials (outside this study)

A second set of comparisons should clarify the distinction further: If assignments are digital, then the format specified can be analog. If assignment and mode are digital, then the focus(i) of comments can be analog. If syllabus/class assignments are digital, then instructional time can be analog.

Did the differing signals (analog and digital) match? Did they cross-over? Study One was one attempt the answer these questions, to establish some hypotheses for further study, so let me quickly summarize the research procedure.

Research Procedure

The study involved the use of a short questionnaire which contained three parts: (1) questions relating to the teacher's intended assignments (according to mode, aim, and relative frequency), (2) the teacher's planned use of instructional time during the term, rated according to amount of time on certain standard topics, and (3) the teacher's rank ordering of importance on sixteen foci of annotation. One hundred and eighteen (118) questionnaires were sent, one to each person who had attended the meetings, or one meeting, of the special interest group. About 60% have responded, of that number (68) only thirty-six could be quantified. Thirty-six is still enough to accomplish the two purposes of the study--one, to test the format of the questions(the

"pilot" aspect) and, two, the stated purpose of the study. Intercorrelation statistics were used to analyze the data. The entire questionnaire and related material are appended.

Results of the Study

General Summary and Summary of Non-Quantifiable Returns.

Not surprisingly, there are many varieties of composition programs currently. There are multi-term programs:

First Term	Second Term	Third Term
Handbook	Genre Reader	
Case Book	Six Themes	
Ten themes	One Research Paper	
Exposition	Argument	Description
Paragraphing	Research Paper	Narration
		Literature
Clarity	Sentences	
Organization	Diction	
Structure	Style	

There are a very few diagnostic, need-based programs; about the same "few" would apply also to programs based on personal writing, and journal-based programs. The usage handbook plus casebook reader program seems to still be the most "standard." More emphasis in the programs seems to be on invention, less on arrangement or style. The basic justification for usage/error based programs is the obscurity problem....i.e., if the message is obscured then probably a usage error has been committed. The most frequently cited authors are McCrimmon, Macrorie, and Hodges (Harbrace Handbook) or Irmscher (Holt Guide). Many casebook editors were mentioned; nearly all casebook titles dealt with social/political issues.

My general impression is that many, many more courses have very specific, well-defined objectives than there used to be. Accountability?

Student Power? Perhaps a counter swing to the basic skills is occurring.

Summary of Statistical Analysis.

1. 75% of subjects intended either an equal mixture of the three kinds of assignment or personal feeling assignments on question one. Less than 30% cited personal feeling. That is, a total of 25% cited only expository or only philosophical resolution assignments.

2. 50% of subjects intended for over one-half of their assignments to have a specific format (question two).

3. Two-thirds of subjects indicated either "no response" or less than one-fourth of assignments will be devoted to description; nearly 90% did the same for narration, BUT

4. 31% stated exposition was the focus of one-fourth to one-half the assignments, and 39% stated exposition was the focus of greater than one-half! 70% of the respondents indicated that over one-fourth of their assigned papers were to be written in the expository mode.

More specific ranking, ratings, and breakdowns comparing intended instructional time with ranking of importance of comment foci for students' papers show some very interesting data.

Figue One represents greater than 10% of subjects in agreement. As you see, it happened that greater than 10% occurred but twice. Keep in mind please that this ranking indicates that, in the first case, 17% of subjects responding rated teaching of conreteness and specificity of language as being given over 25% of their instructional time. Broadening the ranking to include ratings of over 10% we get the data on the lower portion of Figure One. The drop in importance of paragraphing is especially significant. This data indicates that 20% of the teachers responding indicated that instruction in

PLANNED INSTRUCTIONAL TIME - HIGHEST RANKINGS

% OVER 25% OF TIME	AREA OF INSTRUCTION
17	Concreteness, Specificity of Language
11	Paragraphing, Topic Sentences

% OF SUBJECTS BETWEEN 10 AND 25%	AREA OF INSTRUCTION
36	Concreteness, Specificity of Language
30	Sentence Structure, Syntax
20	Logic
19	Researching, Use of Library, Taking Notes, Bibliography
19	Introduction, Conclusion, Transitions Coherence
19	Paragraphing, Topic Sentences
17	Nature and Use of Evidence

Figure 1

AREAS OF ANNOTATION - RANKED PRIORITIES

% OF SUBJECTS RANKING FIRST	FOCUS
64	Organization
61	Unclear Thesis or Emphasis
56	Detailed Support Lacking
42	Lack of Continuity, Coherence
31	Principal Argument not Proved
28	Inconsistency in Reasoning
28	Incorrect or Doubtful Assertion
25	Insufficient Precision

Figure 2

INDICATING FIRST, SECOND, OR THIRD PRIORITY

% OF SUBJECTS	FOCUS
64	Syntax, Sentence Structure
64	Diction
64	Inappropriate Tone or Point of View
64	Tone or Point of View Not Consistently Maintained
53	Language not Vivid, not Fresh
53	Data not Taken into Account

Fig. 3

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME: EXPOSITION AND PERSONAL

EMPHASIS OF INST. TIME	HIGHER RANKING GROUP
Dialects and Levels of Usage	Personal Feeling
Fragments, Runons, Dangling Participles	" "
Comma Errors	" "
Spelling	" "
Editing, Rewriting Techniques	" "
Invention, Prewriting	" "
Paper Formats, Documentation	" "
Thesis Statement	Exposition/Data
Expository Patterns	" "
Introductions, Conclusions, Transitions, and Coherence Devices	" "

Fig. 4

MARKING PRIORITIES: EXPOSITION AND PERSONAL

FOCUS OF MARKING	HIGHER RANKING GROUP
Errors in Use of Words	Personal Feeling
Representation of Experience Insufficiently Precise	" "
Data not Taken into Account	" "
Inappropriate Tone of Voice, Point of View	" "
Unclear Thesis	Exposition/Data
Lack of Coherence	" "
Inaccurate or Doubtful Assertions	" "
Inconsistency in Reasoning or Judgement	" "

Fig. 5

Logic would have at least 10 but no more than 25% of their instructional time. Compare Figure One with Figure Two, which presents considerations ranked first in importance in reading/grading/annotating students' papers. That is, 64% of the respondents indicated that their first priority in responding to a student's paper would be focused on "organization," If I broaden the base to include first, second, and third in importance, the results are presented in Figure Three. I found that the foremost concern for nearly all teachers was "Syntax, Sentence Structure." There seemed to be some discrepancies in what we set out to teach and what we look for in students' papers, so I narrowed my analysis to a very detailed study of the discrepancy patterns (in setting up instructional time compared to importance-ranking of typical annotation foci) of teachers indicating largely "expository" assignments and of those indicating largely "personal feeling" assignments.

* * * * *

Insert Figures One, Two and Three about here

* * * * *

Studying the breakdown of instructional time for each subject who responded "personal feeling" or "expository, data gathering" on question one (and totalling for each group) reveals the topics for instruction listed in Figure Four. Focus(foci) of marking are listed in order of importance; that is, "Errors in Use of Words" is more important than "Data not Taken into Account." Figure Five shows the marking priorities of each group.

* * * * *

Insert Figures Four and Five about here

* * * * *

The group which seems to be most uncertain of priorities is the personal feeling group, but the expository people are not totally consistent.

The inconsistency between instructional time and priorities in reading/grading/evaluating supports the hypothesis I advanced in 1971 in Las Vegas. Namely, we send different signals to our students. We do it without meaning to, but we do do it. We do it when we say:

"Tell me what you think, what you feel. Let me have your ideas."

And then we give it the red pencil.

Or When

We shoot the bull for four or five class meetings and then grade the writing (done during those five to ten days) for the same items we graded for several weeks ago, even though we know we did not teach how to correct the error, how to embed the short, choppy sentences, etc.

Two last specific bits of data will demonstrate my point. People who indicated a high priority (All of the "expository" group from Question One marked it first or second in importance) for thesis statement differed about how much instructional time should be devoted to studying thesis matters--one-half said 10% of time or less; one said zero; one-half said over 15%, two said over one-fourth of all the instructional time in the term. Yet, they all ranked Thesis Statement as first or second in importance in their minds when they look at a student's paper.

All groups marked spelling and comma errors as very high priorities in reading/grading/evaluating student papers, but most gave no instructional time to improving spelling and very little (less than 5%) instructional time to comma errors.

Conclusion

We must be sending, frequently, our students differing signals of what is important to us. They have to play the game of psyching us out, but

we, perhaps, are not even sure of what we want. We know that the best writing is done in a fairly relaxed setting, and I do not think our vacillation or lack of self-knowledge can do anything other than hinder the establishment of such an atmosphere in our classes.

Continued Research

Study Two, larger and much more complex than Study One, will be completed in the Summer of 1973. I have some initial feedback already, and it appears that it is working out well. Study Three is through the design stage and will shortly go into the debugging stage, and then to the printers.

When I have completed the three studies, I shall go back through my files and find certain individuals who typify certain sets of patterns (of responses) and Professor Larson and I have tentatively discussed some very detailed work with those "typical" teachers in (1) studies of their classroom techniques (Ryans, Flanders-Amidon, etc.) and (2) studies of their attitudinal changes over a period of years--I already have and am getting constantly data useful in both of these future aspects.

(Would you join in as a respondent? Please write to me and I'll put your name on the list, and when the next phase begins you will start getting materials.)

QUESTIONNAIRE (Form 1)

___ 1. In this course do you anticipate that your paragraph/paper assignments will be, for the most part:
(A.) Data gathering and relaying/ "straight-forward" exposition
(B.) Personal feeling and opinion papers
(C.) Philosophical dilemma, paradox, or complicated moral issue resolution
(D.) An approximately equal mixture?

___ 2. Will you expect a specific, previously determined and (implicitly or explicitly) stated format in
(A.) None of the papers/paragraphs.
(B.) Less than 1/4 of the papers/paragraphs.
(C.) Between 1/2 and 1/4 of the papers/paragraphs.
(D.) Over 1/2 of the papers/paragraphs?

Please indicate the appropriate fraction of your assignments which will be devoted to

___ 3. Description
___ 4. Narration
___ 5. Exposition
___ 6. Argumentation

(A.) Less than 1/4
(B.) 1/4
(C.) 1/4 to 1/2
(D.) Over 1/2

Please indicate the approximate percentage of instructional time which you will devote to (5%; 5-10%; 10-15%; 15-25%; over 25%):

___ 7. Sentence Structure, Syntax
___ 8. Paragraphing, Topic Sentences
___ 9. Dialect Differences, Levels of Usage
___ 10. Concreteness, Specificity of Language
___ 11. Fragments, Run-ons, Dangling Participles
___ 12. Comma Errors
___ 13. Spelling Errors
___ 14. Capitalization, Punctuation

___ 15. Proofreading

___ 16. Fditing, Rewriting Techniques

___ 17. Tone, Point of View

___ 18. Outlining

___ 19. Precis Writing, Abstracting

___ 20. Invention, Pre-writing

___ 21. Thesis Statement

___ 22. Expository Patterns

___ 23. Accuracy of Material, Facts

___ 24. Nature and Use of Evidencc

___ 25. Image, Metaphor, Simile

___ 26. Introductions, Conclusions, Transitions, Coherence Devices

___ 27. Logic

___ 28. Researching, Use of Library, Taking Notes, Bibliography

___ 29. Paper Formats, Documentation

___ 30. Manuscript Typing

31. In the space below please submit any comments which might help the researche get a better idea of the nature of your composition course(s).

32. Please write an A beside each item in the following list which you consider most important in reading/marking student papers/paragraphs, a B for the second most important, C for the third, D for fourth, and an E for the fifth.

Some Typical Foci in Comments by Instructors in Composition

1. Errors in spelling, punctuation
2. Errors in syntax or sentence structure
3. Errors in use of words, or in idiom (including apparent "wrong word" for idea intended)
4. Infelicities of metaphor, simile, and other figures
5. Unclear organization (paper hard to follow)
6. Unclear thesis or emphasis
7. Lack of continuity (coherence)
8. Assertions made by student inaccurate or doubtful (i. e., criticism of the substance of what is said)
9. Assertions or generalizations lack support of details (evidence)
10. Representation of an experience insufficiently precise or detailed
11. Language used by student lacking invividness or freshness
12. One or more ideas or particular pieces of data not taken into account by student, and should have been
13. Tone of voice or point of view not appropriate to subject or audience
14. Tone of voice or point of view not consistently maintained through complete piece
15. Inconsistency in reasoning or judgement about subject discussed
16. Principal argument or assertion not proved to reader's satisfaction